



# Tracing Elusive Pre-1837 England Ancestry

Phillip Dunn, Sr British Research Consultant

England and Scotland AG®

FamilySearch.org

[dunnpb@familysearch.org](mailto:dunnpb@familysearch.org)

After 1837 in England, there are numerous records and successful means by which to find ancestry and people, such as using a combination of Civil Registration, census and church records. Most vital events for most of England's population can be found. It is *prior* to 1837, commonly referred to as the "black hole" period, where this task quickly becomes complex and requires use of and research primarily in England's church and other records. This class outline will emphasize some critical "helps" for researching ancestry in records of this important era, more *effectively*.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO GET STARTED

Some important points to know before you can get started in England pre-1837 era, are:

1. Learn in which parish your ancestor lived or resided, or was born.
2. Determine date or year of birth via age at marriage or burial of the ancestor, or census
3. Other identifying facts: parents' names (including maiden name), signature, names of siblings, birth order, spouse's name[s], year of emigration, names of neighbors, etc.
4. Learn the occupation

## Home & Compiled Sources for Locating the English Place of Origin

The key to being successful in England research is identifying the parish where an ancestor lived or was born. Knowing an area, region or county can also be helpful, but the exact parish name will lead more swiftly to vital data. After home sources, when the place of origin in England still is not known, see <https://wiki.familysearch.org> and type "Handlist of Compiled Sources" for a list of databases to search. Seek death cert., naturalization, obituary, census, tombstone, military record, etc. See also <https://books.familysearch.org> for family histories.

## IS IT POSSIBLE TO 'QUICK-FIND' PRE-1837 ENGLAND ANCESTRY?

Once the county of birth or last residence is (at least) known, you are ready to seek—**indexes**, as well as databases and transcriptions—which enhance the chance of success in the pre-1837 period. Here are some advantages of finding and using especially indexes:

- Allow you to quickly and thoroughly search a group of records for an area or parish
- Mitigate the need for novices to immediately learn to read old manuscript handwriting
- Reduce time spent searching parish by parish
- Allow you to quickly identify which parish registers need to be searched manually

Indexes or transcriptions must be diligently sought but used with the following cautions:

- They are secondary sources
- They contain mistakes, including omissions and misspellings
- They are always incomplete
- Data from indexes should **always** be checked against the original record for accuracy

## BEST INDEXED RECORD SOURCES FOR RESEARCHING ENGLAND'S PRE-1837 TIME PERIOD

When and where available, the best indexed record sources of choice to search in pre-1837 England in order to construct family pedigrees are indexes to:

- Church records/Parish Registers – are considered primary record sources containing vital information for births (baptisms/christenings), marriages (banns and licenses) and deaths (burials). Most available indexes—online/published pertain to parish registers
- City or county directories: try Google, genuki, or FHLFavorites for “directories”
- Probate records – see [www.fhlfavorites.com](http://www.fhlfavorites.com) for numerous county-wide index link
- Occupational or Guild records – Boyd’s Citizens of London (see “Community Trees” at FamilySearch: see Genealogies pg); Google!, findmypast.co.uk; also see the Family History Library Catalog under the city name and “Occupations - Indexes”
- Chancery records (National Archives’ catalog): online indexes, available; see “C” series
- Military records - (at The National Archives/findmypast: some online; Canadian “C” series military recs. See pensions, post-1860 Muster books & paylists, officers’ rec.)
- Emigration/Immigration – Ancestry.co.uk; findmypast.co.uk, FamilySearch.org
- Electoral Registers/rolls – Ancestry.co.uk

## WHERE TO FIND: INDEXES, TRANSCRIPTIONS AND DATABASES OF ENGLAND RECORDS

Here is a list of places generally and of major websites with indexes and databases to parish registers (and other record sources) as follows:

- 1) County Record Offices – some, i.e. Middlesex (L.M.A.)
- 2) Many indexes or transcribed records may be found:
  - At Family History Societies (of the county) – see their available publications on sale
  - In private possession (for addresses see *Atlas & Index to Parish Registers*, Phillimore & Co.)
  - Online:
    - Google! – try these 3 search terms: “Index”, “Baptisms”, & then “[name of locality”
    - [www.genuki.org.uk](http://www.genuki.org.uk) – see under the name of county for availability
    - <http://www.fhlfavorites.info> – has a vast list of “Favorites” (under Country/County/Parish - at FHCs), under name of *County*; then *Church Records* (Note: many are deadlinks; Google to find new links)
    - <https://wiki.familysearch.org> - under county’s name has “Probate records” section complete with links to *numerous* indexes—for many counties; also has some FHL “Favorites” links (Wales currently and a few others)
- 3) The FamilySearch.org database[s] for England at [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) is currently the single largest online resource for finding Church of England ancestral data available with 140+ million in its databases of mostly parish register extracts and other records. However, note that—
  - No county is *completely* indexed; Shropshire, Bedfordshire, Warwickshire come close
  - 26 counties are 75% (or more) indexed; 11 counties with less—abt 65%, and abt 7 with 40% or less are: Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Rutland, Essex, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Somerset, Suffolk, Wiltshire
- 4) The Society of Genealogists Library, London: ([www.sog.org](http://www.sog.org)) has the largest collection of *transcribed* parish registers of over 11,000 of England’s 13,800 parishes!
- 5) County record offices – hold the original church registers of about 97% of England
- 6) [findmypast.co.uk](http://findmypast.co.uk) has databases containing over 80 million names, including baptisms, marriages and burials (as well as a billion more from other records) from throughout the country
- 4) The Family History Library’s England church records collections have many county-wide indexes and transcribed parish registers, mostly available on CDs, microfiche, books and some are on microfilm; probate records for all counties. View their catalog at--
  - [http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Library/FHLC/frameset\\_fhlc.asp](http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Library/FHLC/frameset_fhlc.asp)
- 5) Search for websites to access online collections at all public/university libraries

- 6) Online Parish Clerk: Volunteers transcribe numerous parishes in each of the following counties: Cornwall, Cumberland, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northumberland, Somerset, Sussex, Warwickshire, & Wiltshire. Google to find—under “Online Parish Clerk”
- 7) Volunteers at <http://www.freereg.org.uk/> - 33 million names/entries from England parish registers. See especially for Norfolk and Somerset with nearly 80% coverages, respectively!
- 8) [www.UKBMD.org.uk](http://www.UKBMD.org.uk) - a most significant gateway to many online county databases

## **‘QUICK-FIND’ ANCESTRY IN ENGLAND: INTEGRATING ONLINE RESOURCES WITH RESEARCHING ORIGINAL RECORDS—TO MORE QUICKLY FIND AND PROVE CORRECT ANCESTRAL LINEAGES**

- 1) Obtain or create a master list—of all parishes comprising a county or a wide area of a county. To do this, you can use any one of the following aids:
  - a. <http://maps.familysearch.org/> - provides an online, free map showing parishes contiguous to your ancestor’s place of birth or residence. Can print maps and parish lists
  - b. <https://wiki.familysearch.org> – use excellent tool by typing in the name of (target) parish which will identify all parishes and churches within a parish boundary
  - c. <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/expertsearch.jsp> - Look up the parish or township name in this excellent online tool: Can form a list of parishes in the area of interest; or, try—Lewis’ *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (see <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/england>)
  - d. Parish Locator” at [www.Genuki.org.uk](http://www.Genuki.org.uk) (downloadable). Type in parish name to find a printable list of all parishes and churches in up to a 25-mile+ radius
  - e. *Phillimore Atlas & Index of Parish Registers* - FHL Book #942 E7pa; at many archives, libraries; obtainable for about \$50-\$95
- 2) Use one of the following resources to help you determine which parish’s records are indexed and available to search online:
  - a. Family History Library Catalog (“[Place Search](#)”; then click “**Church records – Indexes**”. Note: If catalog shows “Computer printout”, it means a parish has been indexed and its data is online for searching--at FamilySearch.org.
  - b. Archersoftware – is a website with an outstanding utility that interfaces with FamilySearch (see <http://www.archersoftware.co.uk/igi/fs-eng.htm>) providing a list of *most* [but not all!] parishes indexed by FamilySearch.org. It can be used to more efficiently help you search parish by parish within a county boundary by a glance of the eye. [Note: It provides only names of indexed parishes up to and as of 2-3 years ago. *Unlisted* parishes (on this website) means *they may not be indexed and infers you may have to [re]search in original parish registers and/or Bishop’s transcripts.*]

- Thus, one by one, you can check off each parish (using your above-mentioned "Parish List"), as you either search index online or, search in the original parish registers; and work parish by parish in this manner throughout whole counties if or as may be necessary—to locate a possible ancestor.
- c. Did you know you can use FamilySearch's search-engine to find what parishes have more recently been indexed: 1) Merely type in the name of your ancestor's parish (accurately spelled!), and 2) click "Search". FamilySearch will provide you with parish/church and census records, etc., data for each parish—*if* indexed!! Use filters to drill down to church records, and time period, i.e. see "Collections" and click to choose from a list of filters.
  - d. Google: the following three search terms to find or locate indexes and databases published either online, or available in CD/Fiche/Booklet format. Merely use the following search terms, i.e.--- 1) [Name of] "Locality", 2) Name of] "Record" type, i.e. "baptisms" or "marriages", etc., 3) "Index"
  - e. Use the list of "England County-wide Indexes" (see below); select and search as many available indexes for the county as possible.
  - f. Findmypast.co.uk: see "About These Records" at bottom of each database page
- 3) Then search the original parish registers of those parishes which are *not yet indexed* (in the above-mentioned list of indexed parishes—see step "2." just mentioned)
  - 4) **\*\*CAUTION:** Again, it's vital to note the geographic limitations of all indexes—especially county-wide ones that you search—to learn specifically which parishes were NOT covered in it! Then manually search those (few) *un-indexed* parish registers (on film, etc.).

Nonconformists: If you have *not* found your ancestor after searching in all parish registers, then use the above gazetteers to identify which nonconformist churches existed in an area, and search each register (indexes when available; the above steps also apply for these) and other record sources. Search especially [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) and [www.bmdregister.co.uk](http://www.bmdregister.co.uk) (\$).

## EFFECTIVE REFERENCE AIDS FOR RESEARCHING PRE-1837 ENGLAND

- Gazetteers: powerful tools indicating key pre-1900 record-keeping jurisdictions (see both—
  - 1) [www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/england](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/england) - Lewis' *Topographical Dictionary of England* (pub. 1848)
  - 2) [www.visionofbritain.org/expertsearch.jsp](http://www.visionofbritain.org/expertsearch.jsp)) – A. Fullarton's *Imperial Gazetteer of England & Wales* (pub. 1870)

- Maps:
  - 1) powerful interactive parish boundary map at [www.maps.familysearch.org](http://www.maps.familysearch.org)
  - 2) *Atlas & Index of Parish Registers* compiled by Phillimore & Co. pub. 2003; FHL Bk #942 E7pa;
- Google!
- FHLC – [Name of Place], [Name of] “Record – Indexes”: FHL has numerous in-house indexes!
- FHL (Family History Library) CDs collections contain numerous available county-wide indexes, some nation-wide indexes, and numerous parish-based indexes. To find, search the online FHLC by typing county name (or parish or “England”), then clicking on “Church Records – Indexes”. Sometimes, indexes have been cataloged under merely “Church Records”
- Film Number: If you know the microfilm number of a parish and would like to determine whether that parish film has ever been indexed by FamilySearch, merely go to FamilySearch.org and click “Search”; then in the “Film/Fiche Number” box, type the microfilm number and then click “Search”. FamilySearch will return all those names found in that microfilm. You may then filter/narrow down by typing the name and surname in the “Birth” or “Marriage” or “Death” field. Currently, of the collection of approximately 75-80 percent coverage of all (microfilmed) Church of England parish registers, about 65-70 percent of all England has thus far been indexed by FamilySearch.org, making it—with findmypast.co.uk—about the single largest website holding Church of England parish register transcriptions/indexes online.
- Batch Number – a tracking number tied to each batch of names, indexed from i.e. parish registers. Each batch contains names found in FamilySearch.org Historical Records Collection and/or in its systems database—which *usually* provides the FHL microfilm call number to the original record source which cites the genealogical information on a name entry—sometimes giving *more* details.
  - Use the “Batch number” search on FamilySearch.org’s search engine.
  - Use one of the following excellent batch number-based websites to help you systematically conduct thorough searches throughout a county for your ancestor, see—
    - 1) [www.archersoftware.co.uk/igi/fs-eng.htm](http://www.archersoftware.co.uk/igi/fs-eng.htm) (hint: use Google Chrome or Firefox)
    - 2) <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hughwallis/IGIBatchNumbers.htm>

Note: Neither of the above two websites provide a complete list of all county parishes, i.e. parishes are not listed—if not indexed by FamilySearch. Those parishes unlisted, you will need to manually search through original parish registers on microfilm; if so, use the FHLC to determine microfilm number[s] to order to a Family History Center (FHC).

## ***A Hand list of Available England County-wide Indexes***

Presented for the first time in this online class, this short list provides the largest and most powerful 'finding' sources county by county which are currently available to England family history researchers—for online, and/or transcribed \*CMB indexes and databases:

### **County Online or Published Indexes and Databases and Transcriptions:**

- **Bedfordshire:** FamilySearch – over 85% county coverage
- **Berkshire:** FamilySearch – has nearly 70% coverage; findmypast (FMP) has some
- **Buckinghamshire:** FamilySearch – has nearly 70% county coverage
- **Cambridgeshire:** Cambridgeshire FHS has indexed nearly 100% coverage to 1900
- **Cheshire:** FamilySearch – w/ ~80% coverage; Cheshire Parish Register Project
- **Cornwall:** FamilySearch, Cornwall OPC – 80+% coverage; FMP – few; Boyds Marr.
- **Cumberland:** FamilySearch – has over 80+% county coverage
- **Derbyshire:** findmypast (FMP) & FamilySearch have over 80% county coverage
- **Devonshire:** FMP & FamilySearch—over 70% coverage; FHL has most par. transcripts
- **Dorsetshire:** FamilySearch, FMP, & Ancestry.com - have abt 65% coverage
- **Durham:** FamilySearch – has 80+% county coverage; findmypast (FMP) has some
- **Essex:** Essex SEAX online has abt 70%+ county coverage; FamilySearch - abt 30% (4.5m) online
- **Gloucestershire:** FamilySearch/Ancestry.com - 80% coverage; Avon FHS CDs
- **Hampshire:** FamilySearch has 5.5m entries; Hants Record Office marriage index; FMP has some
- **Herefordshire:** FamilySearch – has over 80+% county coverage up to 1880
- **Hertfordshire:** FamilySearch – has nearly 90% coverage up to 1875; FMP –same
- **Huntingdonshire:** FamilySearch – over 70% coverage; FMP has 228k burials
- **Kent:** East Kent & West Kent FHS has CDs with abt 70% coverage; FMP & FamilySearch 8 million
- **Lancashire:** FamilySearch/Ancestry.com/OnlineParishClerk – 70% county coverage
- **Leicestershire:** Leicestershire Family History Society has CDs - 70% coverage
- **Lincolnshire:** FamilySearch & Ancestry.co.uk – together a tot. 85+%; FMP - some
- **London:** FamilySearch & Ancestry.co.uk – largest databases for City of London proper, 85+%
- **Middlesex:** Ancestry.co.uk – 22+ million; plus Pallots Marriage Index
- **Monmouthshire:** FamilySearch – has only abt 40% county coverage
- **Norfolk:** FreeReg.org.uk - nearly 80% county coverage; FamilySearch - abt 30%; thegenealogist
- **Northamptonshire:** Northamptonshire R.O. has marriage index; [www.familyhistorynorthants.co.uk](http://www.familyhistorynorthants.co.uk) has published indexes for most of the county
- **Northumberland:** FamilySearch – 85+% coverage; FMP – has some
- **Nottinghamshire:** FamilySearch – w/ 80+% coverage; FMP has some as well



- **Oxfordshire:** FamilySearch - nearly 60% coverage; Oxford FHS has numerous transcriptions
- **Rutlandshire:** LRFHS.org.uk has numerous CDs available; FamilySearch abt 60%
- **Shropshire:** FamilySearch – largest databases for county with 85+% coverage; FMP has some
- **Somerset:** FreeReg.org.uk – has nearly 75% county coverage; FMP - abt 20% coverage
- **Staffordshire:** FamilySearch – w/ 85+% coverage; FMP - some
- **Suffolk:** Suffolk FHS CDs w/ abt 65% coverage (by deanery name); FamilySearch ~50+%; Boyd's MI
- **Surrey:** FamilySearch – with 70+% coverage; FMP has some
- **Sussex:** FamilySearch – 65% coverage; Sussex OPC many parishes completed
- **Warwickshire:** FamilySearch – 85+% coverage; FMP has some; Warwickshire OPC has many
- **Westmorland:** FamilySearch – largest databases for county with 70+% coverage
- **Wiltshire:** FamilySearch – nearly 50% coverage; Nimrod marriage index is complete; FMP - some
- **Worcestershire:** FamilySearch – nearly 75% coverage; see Birmingham & Midland Society publications
- **Yorkshire:** FamilySearch, FMP, Joiner Marriage Index & Ancestry.co.uk – abt 75%

\*\* = Christenings, marriages and burials

### Miscellaneous Indexes

- [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org) – now has some burials online for certain counties
- Probate records: most counties have county-wide indexes available online; Google under 1) county name, with the search terms “index” and “probate” (or “will”); or even—better, use Wiki.familysearch.org and click on “England/[name of]County/Probate”; follow steps
- “Google” the following search terms: i.e. 1) Kent 2) “Indexes” & 3) “Baptisms”
- [www.parishregisters.com](http://www.parishregisters.com) (\$)– a.k.a. East Dockland (London) Ancestors;